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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: review of First United Nations Decade for
the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)

Statement submitted by School Sisters of Notre Dame and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being
circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council
resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996:

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Statement

Educate to eradicate poverty

This year marks the end of the first United Nations Decade on the Eradication of Poverty. It is fitting, therefore, that the 44th Session of the Commission for Social Development take time to evaluate progress that has been made in ending this scourge that afflicts so many and to renew the global commitment to put an end to the poverty that divides and threatens the international community.

In the course of these past ten years numerous international meetings have repeatedly taken up the social development mandate to eradicate poverty, promote social integration and create full employment. Yet despite the promises made in the Millennium Declaration, the Dakar Framework for Action, the Monterrey Consensus, the 10-year review of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme for Action and repeated yet again in the just completed 2005 World Summit, poverty and inequality continue to plague the world's people. Despite notable progress in some areas and regions of the world, the gap between those who have little and those who have much continues to widen and the plethora of promises made in the past decade remain largely unfulfilled.

Clearly the conquest of poverty and the achievement of social development for all is a complex undertaking. It must necessarily include a variety of strategies and policies aimed at ensuring social justice and a world in larger freedom. Education for all must surely be part of any policy mix. As the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document noted, both formal and non-formal education play a critical role in the achievement of poverty eradication and all of the other development goals envisaged in the Millennium Declaration.¹

Education is vital to poverty eradication, social integration and full employment, and essential to the achievement of a more just and equitable global society. The education of girls is a particularly *important* and efficacious component of successful human development efforts.

Progress has been too slow

While progress has been made over the past decade in getting more children into school, the pace remains far too slow. If current trends continue the world net enrollment ratio may reach 87% by 2015—fully 13% points short of the goal of education for all. Furthermore, the poor quality of some education, resulting from irrelevant and obsolete curricula, overcrowded classrooms, untrained teachers and gender discrimination, cause high dropout and repetition rates—especially among girls.²

While many countries have made significant progress toward gender parity in education, girls still account for 57% of the out-of-school children worldwide. Of eighty-three developing nations for which data are available, only half have achieved gender parity at the primary level, less than one-fifth have attained gender parity at the secondary level and only four at the tertiary level.³

¹ 2005 World Summit Outcome, A/60/L.120, September 2005, paragraph 43.

² UNESCO, <http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/>

³ EFA Global Monitoring, 1.

The world has already missed the first—and perhaps the most critical of all the Millennium Development Targets—gender parity in primary and secondary education. Unless immediate action is taken, this unacceptably slow progress will continue to be measured in the unnecessary deaths of millions of people, the loss of billions of dollars of income and the postponement, perhaps by decades, of the achievement of the other Millennium Development Goals.⁴ When girls are left behind the enormous social and economic benefits of girls' education are lost to the entire community.

Girls' education matters

The Secretary-General has clearly identified girls' education as an urgent social development priority.

If we are to succeed in our efforts to build a healthier, more peaceful and equitable world, classrooms must be full of girls as well as boys. By educating girls, we will help raise economic productivity and reduce both maternal and infant mortality. By educating girls, we will improve nutrition, promote health, and fight HIV/AIDS. By educating girls, we will trigger a transformation of society as a whole—social, economic and political.⁵

While education for both boys and girls leads to increased income for individuals and for nations, the education of girls leads to greater gains. Educated women have smaller, healthier and better educated families. Educated girls are less likely to fall victim to HIV/AIDS, trafficking and other forms of violence. Increased education is one of the most important tools to empower women within the family and society and, as that happens, women not only increase their own agency but improve the well-being of their families and help to transform their communities.⁶

Quality education for all

However, simply providing access to education is not sufficient. Schooling must always provide meaningful, quality education which enables the full development of the human person. It must promote understanding, tolerance and respect for human rights as well as the development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for all persons to participate effectively in society.

While no single model is appropriate for all, and education must always fit carefully into local and national contexts, research has uncovered a common set of elements which help to ensure quality education. These include:

⁴ *Girls Can't Wait: Why Girls' Education Matters, and How to Make it Happen* (Brussels, Belgium: Global Campaign for Education, 2005), 1.

⁵ Secretary-General's video message for Conference on Gender Parity in Education—Washington, D.C., 2 March 2005.

⁶ Barbara Herz and Gene B. Sperling, *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World, Executive Summary* (NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 2004), 3-6.

- Teachers, with proper and continuous training, who encourage active, participatory learning by students;⁷
- Curriculum and materials relevant to national and local needs, grounded in students' own culture and context and free of bias and stereotypes;
- Local control of education in which parents, and other citizens, are given an explicit role in holding schools and teachers accountable for delivering results;⁸
- Flexible instruction modes, including alternative delivery formats, classroom hours, and content, so as to meet the needs of out-of-school children, particularly girls, and their families;⁹
- Transparent school management that is accountable to stakeholders and constituents, and capable of monitoring and evaluating school performance;¹⁰
- Dependable educational funding that ensures at least a minimum of education infrastructure, materials, and personnel.¹¹

Recommendations:

Rapid progress can be made toward achieving quality education for all which will help to eliminate poverty and establish equity. Civil society actors and NGOs can partner with governments and intergovernmental organizations to:

1. Build the political will necessary to:
 - a. Create a national and international ethos which clearly identifies the importance and value of educating girls as well as boys;
 - b. Make the education of girls a priority recognizing the key role it plays in eradicating poverty, promoting social integration, creating full employment and accomplishing the Millennium Development Goals.
2. Develop comprehensive national strategies which:
 - a. Include education as an essential component in all development plans and poverty reduction strategies;
 - b. Encourage hard-to-reach children to attend school by emphasizing quality, removing all school fees, introducing conditional cash transfers and school feeding programs and taking actions to make education girl-friendly, such as increasing the number of female teachers, providing adequate sanitary facilities, eliminating gender bias from the curriculum and pedagogy.¹²

⁷ *Teach a Child Transform A Nation* (Washington, DC: The Basic Education Coalition, 2004), 3.

⁸ The UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, *Toward Universal Primary Education: Investments, Incentives, and Institutions* (NY: UN Millennium Project, 2005), 77.

⁹ *Teach a Child Transform A Nation* (Washington, DC: The Basic Education Coalition, 2004), 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *State of the World's Children 2004: Girls, Education and Development* (NY: UNICEF, 2003), 84.

3. Mobilize national and international resources for education.
 - a. Developing nations should increase national funding for basic education to at least 3% of Gross Domestic Product.¹³
 - b. Member nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development should demonstrate their political and financial commitment to "Education for All," as well as, the "United Nation's Girls Education Initiative" and the World Bank's "Fast Track Initiative" by canceling the unpayable debt of poor countries and increasing donor aid for basic education to at least US\$7 billion per year.¹⁴

Conclusions

With more than 100 million children out of school, things can not simply continue along the present course. Eliminating poverty and keeping the pledge of quality education for all comes down to a single question. Is there the political will necessary to keep the promises made to our children?

Governments are responsible for achieving, or enabling the achievement of, the goals and targets that have been set for education. Non-Governmental Organizations have long been a force in promoting and delivering education, especially to those most marginalized and neglected. They must continue to work with governments, local communities and UN agencies to build educational capacity. Finally, all people must continue to work to mobilize the necessary political will and to hold civil society actors, governments and international agencies accountable for commitments made and resources pledged.¹⁵

Note:

Statement endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Christian Children's Fund, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, International Council of Jewish Women, International Council of Women, International Kolping Society, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and UNANIMA International.

¹³ *Girls Can't Wait*, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Civicus, <http://www.civicus.org/mdg/2-3.htm>